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Ain't I a Woman?

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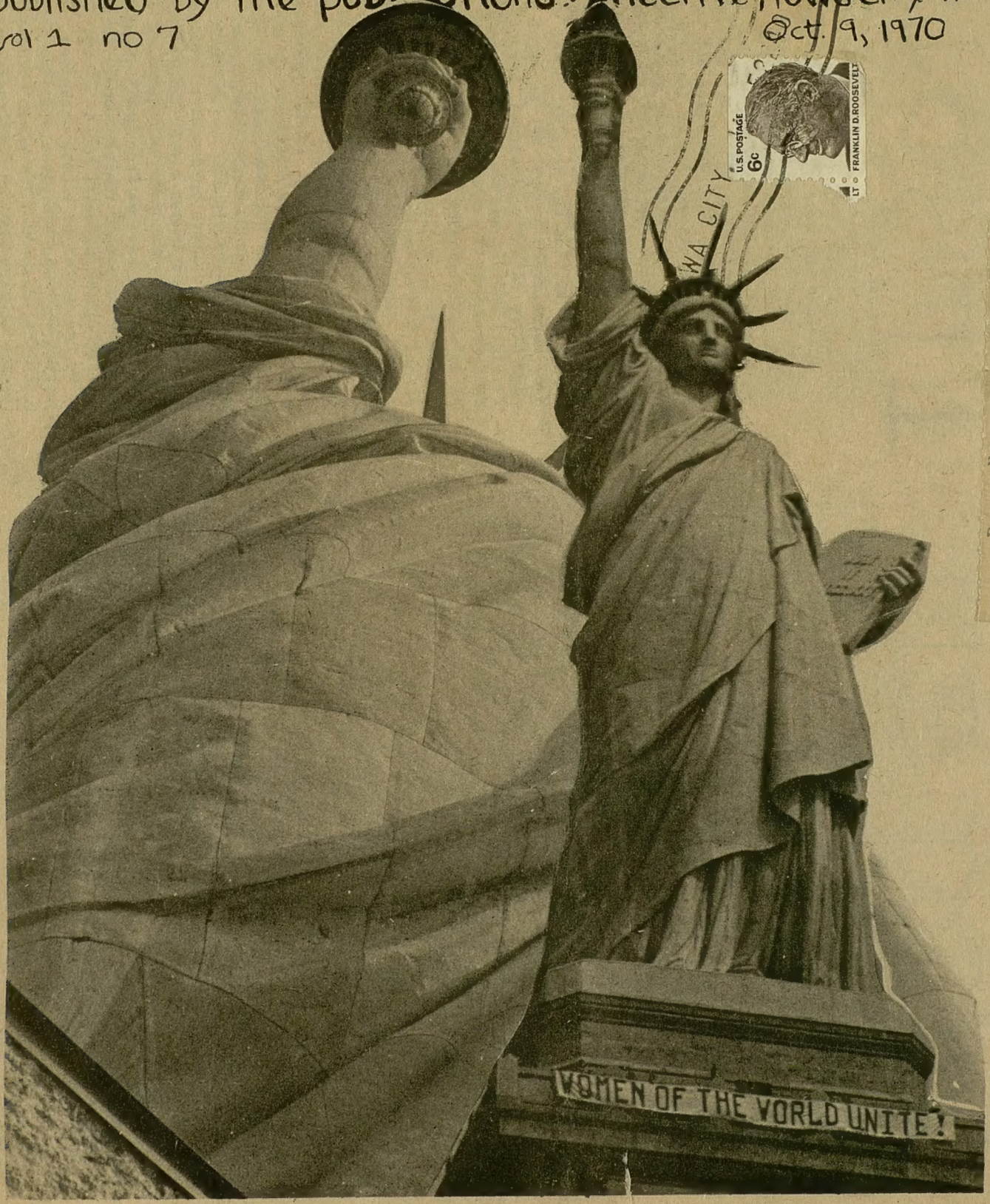

IA CITY

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Women Inspired

We received the following letter and statement from women in Seattle and we thank them for sharing their experience with us. We love them for their strength and beauty in working as women to build a revolutionary movement that speaks to all the people, for refusing to shut up and "wait until after the Revolution," for reminding us again that any male-dominated revolution would simply reinstitute oppression under another name.

So long as men deplore the "rape of Vietnam" and create conditions that encourage the rape of women (the objective fact, not just the glorious rhetoric used to gain power over other people,) we can only see such men as degenerate forms of all they claim to be attacking.

We know from our own lives how little we have to lose because women have so little. We know how the desperation of women is played on by so-called "professional revolutionaries." All women who think of themselves as revolutionaries, and all men who claim to be struggling with their "male chauvinism" should read this and support our sisters in Seattle.

Dear Sisters,

We are sending you this statement hoping that you will be able to use it in sharing our experiences with other women. We acted to strip seven male leaders of their political power and stop them from acting as the spokesmen of the Left.

It is our sisters all over the country, who by beginning to build a movement based on our own experiences and coming out of our love for each other have given us the strength and power to fight for our real, not pseudo, liberation.

Please do not excerpt any parts of this article; taken out of context it doesn't mean as much and it might damage the conspiracy case. A lawyer on the defense has read the article and finds nothing incriminating in it.

GANG RAPE IN SEATTLE

The Seattle Liberation Front sponsored the Sky River Rock Festival. Three women were gang raped. One woman was stabbed attempting to escape. A fourth rape was prevented by a female "chauvin patrol."

Two days after Sky River, women from the women's liberation movement intruded upon an SLF general meeting. We denounced seven men who had fucked us over, used and destroyed people, and created a white, male supremacist movement in Seattle.

The movement in Seattle is,in many ways, a microcosm of the Movement across the country. The men we denounced are not unusually evil, brilliantly manipulative, or exceptional leaders in any sense. All over the country men have defined the Revolution. People who want to act have had to exist in the context these men set up. We feel a responsibility to sisters across the country to explain our action and the history behind it.

It began, in Seattle, with the arrival of Michael Lerner from Berkeley. He set up shop as Radical Marxist Professor at the University of Washington, and used his classes to inject politics and liberal guilt into his students. But he was not content with the notoreity his yippie-style histrionics and flamboyant hairiness won him. Lerner used his voyeuristic Berkeley experience to give him credence, his former roommate Jerry Rubin to give him glamour and access to the media. The Berkeley Liberation Program (with a section on the workers tacked on) was bait for the "groovy people" he wanted to use as organizers.

It worked. A collective was formed, composed mainly of Lerner's students. Then, on the 19th of January, a meeting was called, the program was read, and two more collectives began to pull together.

A lot of us hadn't been in the movement before. We had looked into existing organizations and dismissed them. SDS was Weather-MAN controlled. The only alternative to SDS, Radical Organizing Committee, spent its time in sterile debates over meaningless agendas.

We thought that SLF would give us a chance to connect; that the collective structure would allow us autonomy, creativity, and self-respect.

We might have harmed ourselves less and recognized sooner the impossibility of achieving anything good in that context if the Sundance gang hadn't arrived. Chip Marshall, Bobby Oram, Jeff Dowd, and Michael Abeles, fresh from Cornell SDS, arrived ready to take over the Seattle movement. (Joe Kelly was to arrive soon after). Sundance spotted Lerner as a man they could use when he spoke with Rubin at a rally, three days before the first SLF meeting. They contacted him the same day and began their alliance. Lerner provided the "base on campus". Sundance provided revolutionary models for hero worship, objects for media infatuation, and much of the energy and direction of SLF.

We found our energies absorbed into a whirlwind of "organizing" defined and directed by the all-seeing, all-knowing eye of the Sundance center. There was no time for us to find and defend what was important to us. The Chicago conspiracy trial was ending; we felt we had to respond.

TDA came and went as a window-smashing melee. We got our riot credentials running through the streets breaking bank windows, pushing people out of the way of the rocks falling around them, while the well-disciplined tac squad arrested 75 people.

The demonstration got Lerner and Sundance the publicity they wanted so much. They were made SLF by the media, and they were SLF to the people who poured into the organization afterwards.

Sundance had injected some youth culture hype into the program and they became the center of the Seattle movement social scene by arranging huge parties with lots of beer, dope, wine, and girls. By procuring money for expensive, multi-colored leaflets and programs, they made an immediate impact on a movement so impoverished that the acquisition of mimeo paper was a hassle. Many established groups, who at first refused to incorporate themselves as SLF collectives, began to succumb to what was happening. And SLF was what was happening. People were afraid to be left out of the Revolution.

To the burgeoning and freaked-out SLF, the Sundance "command collective made clear the only thing to do was become a professional revolutionary. So people quit their jobs, dropped out of school, grew their hair, smoked lots of dope, and hung out with the people at the Century Tavern.

The mass dropout in the spring made no sense unless we believed in a teenage revolution - people had none of the skills necessary to survive. But it did provide Lerner and Sundance with a large pool of unskilled labor to use as shitworkers, and people who depended on them completely for direction to their lives.

And the ethic Sundance lived by was not anti-materialistic. The ethic was to rip off. Bobby Oram showed us the way, spending hundreds of dollars hard-pressed collectives had earned for an SLF office, on Sundance rent and beer. "Living communism" was exemplified by Sundance, who declared everything most people have to do to survive "bourgeois", while exploiting people who had money or worked (mainly women) to support their incredibly expensive life style.

We had wanted to exceed ourselves, to transform ourselves. Instead we found ourselves striving for collective salvation by individual suicide. There was no questioning of methods, no discussion of strategy, no confrontation of leadership. In our frenzied state of mind, any confusion, any hesitation would hold back the Revolution. We had developed too much guilt and, as professional revolutionaries, too much contempt for the people we were trying to reach to actually build anything. So we tried to lose ourselves in frenetic activity. Chip Marshall laid it down for all of us: "I don't care what the form is, as long as we keep the motion going."

A woman who used to be in Sundance described their style well: "Despite our naive intentions to build ourselves into new men and women, we found our lives falsely divided into daytime political organizing and night-time attempts to escape the unthinking robots we had become. After evangelistic meetings to organize dormies, after chaotic meetings full of shoutdowns and bullshit, after scary and whirlpool demonstrations the pattern was the same: go home and get drunk, get stoned, get fucked; but by all means forget. Don't discuss the day's activities, how you felt or what you learned. Escape it, release your tensions. Be prepared for tomorrow's repeat performance."

It was only later that we realized how desperate we had been, and how that desperation had been used; only later that we realized how afraid and unable we were to face ourselves, what we were and what we had to become; only later that we realized that SLF had brought into being a way of life designed to keep us from anger, from love, from strength, from freedom, from all but the illusions of those things: all of us bound together by weakness, hysteria, and desperate need.

But we realized these things pretty late in the game. Sundance had already abrogated to themselves the right to define our lives and the category of "revolutionary." Their white male arrogance assured them of their perfect right to do so. And they were rich in capital: mastery of the jargon, access to money, media and movement contacts.

Still, it was not until the Roach Tavern incident that we fully realized what it meant to be a woman living and working in a male-created, male-defined movement.

The Roach Tavern was a bar popular with Seattle bikers and the Sundance crew; a "movement bar" which held SLF benefits and proudly displayed a sign reading: "This is a man's bar. Women will be tolerated only if they refrain from excessive talking."

When a small group of independents, Radical Women, were threatened and assualted after tearing down this sign, they took their complaints about SLF's patronage of the bar to the only people who had the power to do anything about it: Sundance. The Sundance men deplored Radical Women's tactics. "After all, fascism is going to come down soon," Joe Kelly philosophized while writing off half the human race, "We can't afford to alienate the bikers."

We stayed in SLF, but we began trying very hard to develop an alternative. Talking with other women, we agreed that the problem was not merely that women did the organizing while men made the speeches. Our humanity was denied to us. Michael Lerner could talk about the availability of a woman for his bed and joke, "Well boys, I guess it'll take gang rape for this one." (Hey, Mike, heard any good nigger-lynching jokes lately?)

The "woman question" became a topic of conversation for the men, but with the carefully drawn distinction between women's liberation - liberals and manhaters - and truly revolutionary

To Commit Herstory

women, those who were fighting for the real (white male) revolution. The realization hit us that our oppression and liberation was peripheral to the things our "brothers" talked about and did. The reality of our lives was peripheral to their revolution.

And we began to realize we could not trust them to fight for anyone's liberation. They exploited women in their daily lives. Mike Abeles could fuck a 16 year old virgin, give her the clap, not tell her, and leave her. And he couldn't understand what he had done: "I don't see how you can be oppressing someone when you're socking it to them." And Chip Marshall was only a little more sophisticated in his approach. When asked what male chauvinism was about, he responded, "It means you don't treat your girlfriend like a sexual object." Jeff Dowd could threaten a woman: "You bitch! I'd like to smash your face in. You're not oppressed. Men are oppressed. We're the ones that are dying in Vietnam and rotting in the jails."

We were forced to use the oppression of black people in explaining our own to movement men. But we began to see that although they responded to that analogy out of liberal guilt, they did not understand oppression. They understood power. It was their knowledge of the power they had over other people that sustained their egos and drove them to action.

By April, an anti-male leadership grumblings increased, "secondary leadership" began to emerge. Lerner and Sundance men chose certain men as protogees and fucked selected women into leadership positions.

Then the conspiracy busts for TDA came down. And the second level leaders swaggered and jived as best they could, trying to make it in the movement. One of the macho men's protogees, Rick Alba, who was later to become the Sky River big schtick, did pages of research on employment at Boeing for an anti-war demonstration there, and presented it to the SLF. Surprise. Not a single fact about black or women workers.

Many women refused to go to the Boeing event; it was just another male-defined, male-led demonstration. Those of us who did go supported one of the women on tactical leadership when she refused to give her speech after being totally ignored by the male leadership. Afterwards the female exodus from SLF began in earnest.

But a few days later came Cambodia, Kent State, Jackson State, Augusta. Everyone reached the point of freaked-out suicidal hysteria we'd been headed for, with the SLF heavies still managing somehow to define the only proper revolutionary response: stupid, ineffective, "militant" actions in which women were ordered into the front-lines and were used as cannon fodder for the Revolution.

After the strike, many more people left SLF: some disgusted, some burnt out, some resolving never to be used again. We'd come to realize exactly what Chip Marshall meant when he said, "In a revolution, people have to be manipulated."

During the summer we were forced to deal with SLF only twice: once to stop them from claiming a women's center some of us had set up, as an SLF project; and a second time to stop Jeff Dowd from handpicking people to represent Seattle on a "youth culture" trip to Cuba. We read disgusting articles which offered the nearly defunct SLF as the answer to a fragmented left.

But many other people had come out of their "revolutionary" trance. The feeling was growing that SLF - and most of the movement - was merely a degenerate form of what it claims to be attacking. We tried to get in touch with our feelings and the reality of our lives: to live as human beings and do our work.

Then came August and Sky River. The reaction of the women's movement to the festival was varied. We were appalled at the arrogance of sponsoring any rock festival after Altamont, and especially at SLF's extravagant claims for it. We doubted they would be able to ejaculate politics into the youth culture whose worst aspects they had hyped as revolutionary.

But after being assured by the Hydra collective (who undertook the festival's sponsorship) that "of course they were against 'male chauvinism' - this was a political event" and that there would be adequate food supplies, sanitary facilities, and protection, some women decided to go.

Then we heard about the gang rapes. And the reactions of the men: "Well, it depends on the circumstances, but I never saw anything wrong with a little fucking, myself." Abeles was not alone in thinking the horror of Sky River for women unimportant. Most of the men brushed it off: "I don't believe there were any gang rapes..." "the women got what they deserved."

We had tried to render SLF irrelevant. But what it did was still affecting us as women. We knew who had the power in SLF, we knew who had been most responsible for creating an atmosphere in which rapes could occur and be condoned. That knowledge shaped our decision to denounce those men: Mike Abeles, Rick Alba, Jeff Dowd, Joe Kelly, Chip Marshall, Michael Lerner, and Bobby Oram.

We cannot be expected to tolerate the existence of a movement which is oppressive to women, merely because it is packaged and sold as revolutionary. It is not enough for us to build an alternative to it. What its leaders do still affects us as women. That is why we felt it necessary to expose the basis of their power and attack their use of it.

Both the denunciation itself, and this statement were done with the full awareness that five of the men named - Abeles, Dowd, Kelly, Lerner, and Marshall - have been indicted on federal conspiracy charges for TDA.

Although we cannot support a defense based on macho jive nor an attempt to use this trial to recruit people into a sexist movement, we will support an honest defense.

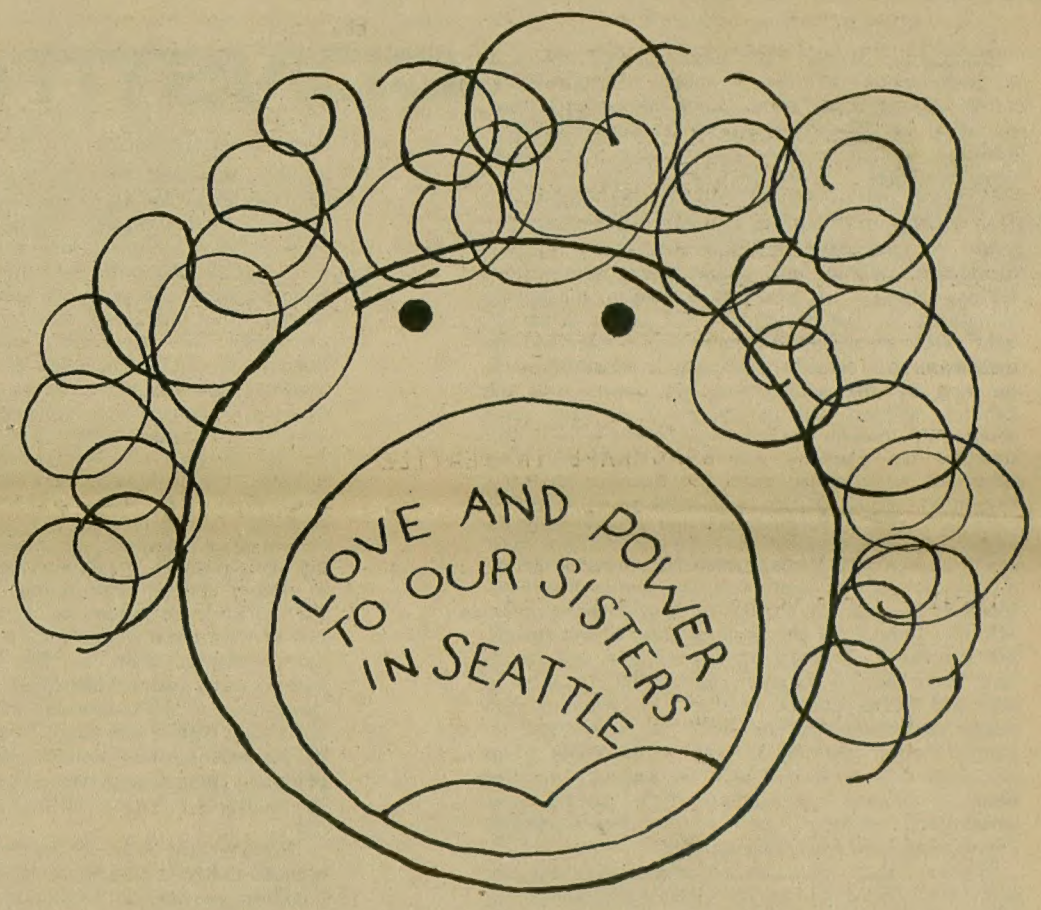
The defense of the Chicago Conspiracy was based on making movement stars into superstars. Because of their prominence in the movement it was possible to rally support on that basis. The Chicago Conspiracy were not convicted on the conspiracy law and there has been no precedent set on its use.

The Seattle defendants do not have the movement status of those men, and a defense built on that basis will undoubtedly fail. But more importantly, such a defense does not make clear the real dangers of the conspiracy law. What should have been done in Chicago and what must be done in Seattle is to build a defense based on the repressive nature of the conspiracy law, not on the personalities of these defendants.

We feel that an honest defense is necessary. If there is any hope for that at all - or for an honest Seattle movement - this action may have cleared the way for it.

Love and Power to our Sisters,

Anna Louise Strong Brigade
Fanshen
Many independent women



Sisters,

If you could stop a lie in Seattle, maybe we can help to stop it across the country.

Yesterday we received a package from Liberation News Service containing one of those expensive, multicolored leaflets from SLF, which informed us that the 27 collectives in SLF were responsible for day care centers, and a women's center among other things. (Strange that their program demands don't say anything about women or speak to any of the special needs of women?)

The movement press will have to stop functioning in the same way as the establishment press-- only as much truth as the people can bear. Maybe they should realize that we're not going to shut up, that we're going to spread the truth about women and about those things that happen to us and they're just going to have to come to terms with it or be left out of our revolution.

The movement press is going to have to stop functioning as a degenerate form of what it claims to be replacing--packaging and selling as revolutionary those things which degrade and destroy women in the same ways and with the same arrogance as the male-dominated power structure. We think that anyone who wants to support an honest defense in Seattle should support our sisters in the collectives:

THEIR ADDRESS IS
Fanshen, 2339 Boylston East, Seattle, Washington 98102

As women build their revolutionary movement, a strong movement, we are often asked to make alliances or give support to other revolutionary groups. Sometimes the people who want us to align with them are so blatantly sexist that there is no doubt that they do not take the woman's movement seriously, but in fact only use it for their own ends. However, most often the line is not that clear, and we fool ourselves into beleiving that something can be gained by working with other potentially revolutionary groups. We as women and they as potential revolutionaries must all learn to take the women's movement seriously. We can not compromise our politics for what appear to be gains. We should know by now that no one but women can be expected to be on guard for the oppression of sisters.

The Revolutionary People's Convention brings all these points home and it stands out as the most recent blatant example of the oppression of women by another supposedly right-on revolutionary group. In the male-left and straight papers we've seen boot-licking radical males exclaim how the Panthers are right-on, non-racists and must be the true vanguard of the people's revolution. We ask just who do they (male radicals and Panthers) think are the people? Women Are The People! Aint I A Woman? would like to emphaa side of the "people's" convention that has been only only briefly mentioned in non-feminist papers.

PANTHER CONSTITUTION CONVENTION

We, a group of New York Lesbians, after two days of participation in the so-called "Revolutionary People's Constitutional Convention" left with the clear realization that if women continue to struggle for their liberation within contexts defined by sexist male mentalities, they will never be free.

Lesbians and movement women were excited by Huey P. Newton's written gesture of solidarity and came to contribute strength and vision to the convention. Within our group there were mixed feelings. Those of us who had worked on the agenda committee for the convention had set up a format with which all oppressed peoples could relate and the mechanism for actually producing a constitution of, for and by the people was laid down. That the Panthers allowed such a committee to exist came about only through the insistence of the women who attended the planning session in Washington. An agreement was reached with the Panthers that the convention would reflect consciousness of women's oppression; that there be workshops around women's oppression and sexual self- determination, that a third world woman with a heavy woman's consciousness be a keynote speaker; and that a woman chair the sessions. The agenda committee kept meeting in an effort to provide for the administration of this agenda, but Panther communication got fainter and fainter until there was no communication at all. Those of us who had this experience went to the convention with heavy reservations but also with the hopes that the Panthers were operating in good faith. Those of us who hadn't been involved with the agenda committee went in sincere anticipation of a constitutional convention that would unite all oppressed peoples. This is what we actually encountered.

Michael Tabor was scheduled to speak at 9:00 a.m. with the workshops around social groupings, i.e., women, lesbians, third world, etc., meeting at 2:00 p.m. At 11:00 a.m., the Panthers began the security process of searching the thousands of people waiting to hear the speech. Sometime after 1:00 p.m. the speech actually began. Most of us dug it and were pleased with the frequent references to women and homosexuals; however, we were also disturbed at the superficiality of the presentation, which did not spring from real awareness of our oppression. The words "women" and "homosexual" were attached to the talk much like a caboose, easily detachable, is tacked on to the end of a train.

Getting the gist of the message and eager to begin the real business of writing a constitution, we left early in order to participate in the Lesbian workshop and therefore did not hear that all the workshops were cancelled. Two movement sisters still present, realizing the importance of the workshops and the need for women to talk to each other, asked the Panthers to announce a women's workshop for early the next morning. This request was denied and the women told that any such meeting would be considered a caucus outside the framework of the convention. In the light of the fact that the Panthers then announced a Yippie meeting, the sisters realized that women who dare to identify with their own oppression were felt by the Panthers to be a serious threat.

That afternoon the Lesbian workshop produced a paper on demands that were born out of an awareness of our oppression and that were basic to gaining our freedom. At the same time, the agenda committee found a third world woman speaker with the requisite consciousness who was prepared to speak on the platform with Huey that evening. This woman speaker was affirmed by Panther leadership that afternoon, but later in the evening, denied access to the building by the same leadership.

Outside McGonigle Hall, New York City Lesbians sat and listened on transistor radios to Huey declaiming about the declaration of independence for Black manhood and promising to level the earth in pursuit of the goal of the dignity, glory and flowering of this same Black manhood. This was followed by a Panther sister whose rap was totally devoid of any awareness of women's oppression and merely an echo of male Panther rhetoric. Filled with outrage, we saw clearly the pointlessness of further relationship to the sexist, manipulative Panther convention. We decided to take our experiences and conclusions to the scheduled women's meeting the next morning.

By Sunday morning, women had still not officially met together. (Although the Panthers had cancelled the Saturday workshops, a couple hundred women met out of their own need and hammered out three sets of demands.) The all-woman's meeting scheduled for Sunday at 9:00 a.m. was also cancelled by the Panthers. Saturday night, the sisters who tried to call a meeting the day before mimeographed a leaflet that documented the shit that was coming down and called for a woman's meeting at the Women's Center. However, the Panthers in response to the threat of an independent all-women's meeting, hit the streets with a flyer that the workshop on self-determination for women would become the delayed all-women's meeting. This resulted in women-identified women having to choose between making their sole contributions to the women's workshop, or lending their strength to one of the topical workshops, i.e., distribution of land, control of government, etc. This overlapping scheduling forced many women-identified women out of the mainstream of the convention in the interest of having a dialogue with sisters about women's oppression. And if you think this account of what happened is confusing, you should have experienced the reality — the reality of being fucked over by the Black Panther Party.

The Lesbians went to the Panther called meeting, because that is where most of the women went. Our intention was still to relate our experiences, raise the question of the relevance of the convention to Women's Revolution in the light of the blatant sexism of the preamble and the oppressive treatment the women were receiving. Our meeting was presided over by a Panther woman with male Panther guards ringing the room and balconies. Immediately, women began to struggle with the question of the intimidating presence of the men, but lost to the argument that they were there to protect the Panther woman. Meanwhile, across town, the gay men were meeting with another Panther woman who apparently required no such security.

As the workshop went on, a definite pattern of response and repression was observed. When demands for actions leading to the real equalization of power between the sexes undiluted and unsubverted by traditionally defined women-role concerns (i.e., the Lesbian demands), enthusiastic response of the women was met with charges of racism and bourgeois indulgence. To point out the absurdity of this, our demand for the abolishment of the nuclear family, heterosexual-role programming and patriarchy was called bourgeois and demands for 24-hour child-care centers was labelled right-on revolutionary. The women present were decidedly in need of time to continue to speak to each other, and voted for time to break into small groups around their various identifications. Male-identified Panther and YAWF women wanted to dispense with these time-consuming details and pushed for a quick drafting of a demands document arrived at by majority vote!

In spite of the blatant put-downs and manipulations, the larger group of women tried to act in their own interests, some sensing for the first time that the Panther schedule was not designed to accommodate them. But even their vote for small groups was subverted when the women running the meeting arbitrarily divided the room into quarters, effectively ending any chance for real communication.

Having done our best to communicate our consciousness to the women, and still fully aware of the irrelevance of this male-dominated militaristic hierarchical structure to our needs, the Lesbians caucused and decided to split. Part of the atmosphere that contributed to that decision was intimidation by individual threats of violence throughout the weekend, the unnerving presence of the guards and the prevailing atmosphere of sexism. More relevant than this was our realization that our efforts would be wasted in trying to deal with men without the power to validate our demands. We had attempted to negotiate on enemy territory and found it oppressive and unworkable.

The story that unfolded after our leaving Philadelphia was told to us in New York by a beautiful Lesbian sister, who remained and followed the action. The sexist insensitivity of the Panthers obviously became apparent even to themselves. The tapes of this women's workshop, made by Newsreel and Radio Free People, were confiscated on the spot by the Panthers.

It was resolved on the floor that the Lesbian demands, which had elicited such enthusiastic response, be included in the demands paper even though we weren't present. Our sister went to the chosen demands committee and was assured that the Lesbian statement was included. That evening, at the convocation, the report from the workshop on self-determination for women was called for. Joan Bird and Mother McKeever collided mid-stage with yellow papers flying in a struggle for the microphone. Panther guards separated them, but somehow Mother McKeever grabbed the field. Now you know who Joan Bird is, but Mother McKeever is another trip entirely. A large, gray-haired, black woman, she had spent the day in attempts to harrass and subvert the workshop. When women addressed their own needs, her charges of racism were the loudest. She called Lesbians "men" and tried to discredit us by appealing to old sexist hangups. After an afternoon of denunciations and harangues, this same Mother McKeever presented herself as representative of the workshop. The women who had prepared the actual demands got tacked on to the end of the program.

To put it briefly, in neither of the reports were the Lesbian demands included. Sisters who were waiting to hear them rushed forward to see what had happened, and to demand that they be read. What had happened was that someone had deleted them, but tried to appease the women with promises that they would appear in the printed copy of the workshop paper. The tragi-comic compromise they made with our demands is as follows:

That women have the right to choose heterosexuality, bisexuality or homosexuality. That crash programs in the technology relevant to women be made available to them, i.e., child care.

We'd like you to realize that Lesbians and women-identified women went to this conference with no awareness of being a particular threat. The hysterical and paranoid reaction of the Panthers has helped us to realize the potency of our position as women whose primary concern is our own revolution.

This paper is a reconstruction of the experience of a group of white Lesbians at the Revolutionary People's Constitutional Convention and an analysis of the Women's Movement in relation to the Black Panthers. Although we recognize the difference in the black and white experiences, we are not presuming to analyze the black experience; but we cannot and will not invalidate our own experiences as women. Speaking from our guts, from the depth of our oppression, we say that the Black Panthers are sexist; that the Black Panther Party, supposedly our brothers in revolution, oppresses us is a doubly painful thing. But we will take no one's shit. And we, Revolutionary Women (as opposed to women revolutionaries) can act only from our own reality. We must, we will, make our women's revolution. No longer will we die alongside men who define our place and keep us there, whose highest flattery for us is our revolutionary wombs. Fuck that. We women of a dispersed nation will build our community, speak in a woman's language born from our woman's oppression, grow strong together and explode in our women's revolution.

LESBIAN DEMANDS

Lois Hart

SEP.5,1970

Women are the revolution. It must not be alluded to that women are merely an extension of a male ego game. Women are not machines that will mass-produce infant revolutionaries. The entire success of the revolution does not depend on whether or not the male will "allow" the woman her liberation, but rather on the woman freeing herself of all crippling male identities and realizing the strength that is found in solidarity with her sisters.

All previous revolutions were dominated by the male mentality. In fact, previous revolutions have been incomplete. While they have served the purposes of men, there have been no revolutionary changes in the conditions of women. Women's revolution will be the first fundamental revolution because it will do what all the others aspired to.

The demands of the Lesbian workshop on September 5 in connection with the "People's Revolutionary" Constitutional Convention call for the complete control by women of all aspects of our social system. What evolved when twenty to twenty-five lesbians wrote these demands is in itself proof of the validity of these demands. Women who have asserted their autonomy, women who have severed the ties between themselves and the male power structure (even in the form of a one to one relationship with a man), women who are already learning to love and cooperate with one another, women who are not making the mistake of trying to deal with men with whom the ultimate decision always lies because women have no power base from which to speak.

The Lesbian Workshop demands will eventually lead to the equalization of all power resources, so that someday human beings of all sexes can deal with each other on a more realistic level.

DEMANDS OF THE LESBIAN WORKSHOP

1. Sexual autonomy
   Prohibit sexual role programming of children.
2. Destruction of the Nuclear Family
   The nuclear family is a microcosm of the fascist state, where the women and children are owned by, and their fates determined by, the needs of men, in a man's world.
3. Communal care of children
   Children should be allowed to grow, in a society of their peers, cared for by adults whose aim is not to perpetrate any male-female role programming. It is advised that these adults be under the direction of women-identified women.
4. Reparations
   a) Women are a dispersed minority and we demand that amount of control of all production and industry that would ensure one hundred percent control over our own destinies. This control includes commerce, industry, health facilities, education, transportation, military, etc.
   b) Because women have been systematically denied information and knowledge and the opportunities for acquiring these, we demand open enrollment of all schools to all women, financial support to any woman who needs it, on the job training with pay for all women attending technical schools and under apprenticeship.
   c) Women demand the time and support to research, compile and report our history and our identity.
   d) The power and technology of defense are invested in men. Since these powers are used to intimidate women, we demand training in self-defense and the use of defense machinery. A Woman's Militia would be organized to defend the demands, rights and interests of women struggling towards an unoppressive social system.

A Woman Speaks

When Afeni Shakur called the Radicalesbians asking them and Gay Liberation Front to Washington for a planning meeting preparatory to the Constitutional Convention I was charged with excitement. Afeni Shakur — beautiful Black woman, virile, revolutionary, nickname "Power" — sexual excitement. REVOLUTIONARY PEOPLE'S CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION — that has the flavor of an historical event — visionary excitement. The Black Panthers are making a statement on Gay Liberation; Gay Liberation Front invited to participate. Consciousness of sexism, heterosexual oppression of women and Gays, finally linked with the struggle against racism. A public revolutionary document, perhaps the first manifesto of the New World, its consciousness complete. A naive enthusiasm but this unexpected recognition sparked it. The oppression of Women and Homosexuals so long denied, ridiculed, misunderstood — is a story that has hardly begun to be told. So ancient an enslavement, so branded into our psyches, we assume our bondage to be the natural order of things. Yet for all its new awakening, its voice still feeble, its smoldering rage still leashed, we know that an understanding and uprooting of sexism is the end of all oppression, all power games — the key to the final blow for human liberation. This acknowledgment from what seems to be the heaviest group of people dealing with racism energized and inspired each gay woman and man rolling toward Washington for the meeting.

As groups we represented the THIRD WORLD GAY REVOLUTION, RADICALESBIANS and GLF women and men. But the telling of this has to be completely subjective. I was a white woman coming into the Panther presence — active in the movement a little more than a year — freshly awakened and growing consciousness of Women's and Gay oppression — sick and angry at almost everyone except radical Gay sisters, questioning the validity of working with gay men and their infuriating unconscious sexism — ruling out straight men categorically as SUPER PIG — and here were the Panthers, a straight man's trip in cinemascope and technicolor. Super butch, the brown, muscled bare-aremed, deep-voiced Afro-American — their words cracked with rage and self righteousness. They moved the meeting along tracks of their prearranged program oblivious of everyone unless she or he was in agreement or of use. They insulted us with words of democratic proceedure while bulldozing through their agenda. I felt intimidated, angry and defensive. "I have come here to find out why and if gay people should relate to this convention. Is there receptivity to Women's and Gay Liberation?"

"We'll tolerate that crazy talk about 30 seconds and you'll be asked to leave!" The room exploded and hummed with long harangues by black women and men who were outraged at my white thin-skinnedness, my racism, my gross lack of empathy and awareness of Black oppression — That I should question the need for a new constitution! Two GLF men tried to support me explaining that I wasn't questioning the need for the constitution or denying Black oppression — that we were under the impression we were asked here for a dialogue. Jim proclaimed loudly his support of the Panthers as the vanguard party. "Fool," I thought, "you are not speaking for me. These facists would obliterate us." I wanted to leave.

People began signing up for committees. Some gay brothers and sisters, feeling like me, left the room downcast, ready to leave. On impulse I put my name in for the agenda committee; perhaps in an effort to understand, or desire to battle the thing through a little further — or maybe I just couldn't stand the feelings of defeat and disconnection. In the hall Kip said to me, "I told you to come on as a revolutionary first and save the sexist confrontation till after you made that connection." Ann said, "You came on like Whitey. You were talking down to them. That one from you oppresses and enrages Black people." I began to understand a little. Two groups, one Black, one Gay — both locked inside our awarenesses of all the gross and subtle tones and manners designed to keep us down. They didn't know yet how they looked to me but I caught a glimpse of how I looked to them.

The agenda committee turned out to be 3 Black men (one Panther) and 5 women, one Spanish and 4 white. The first argument arose over the keynote speaker who was expected to be Hughey P. Newton. I began to feel that I was on that railroad again. "Look," I said, "It is very painful for me to argue with you like this but I am sitting here torn whether to continue to relate to this or not. Black consciousness is very well defined and because of the efforts and struggle of Blacks it presence is heavy in this room. The oppression of Women and Gays is scarcely articulated. Some people sitting here aren't even aware of it and think I am crazy as I talk. But I am both a woman and gay and if this congress is going to reflect my awareness how can I accept a male hero figure? No matter how great a person he might be, the straight man glorified is my oppression. Do I relate to the Black movement at this time in history and say fuck it to my struggle? or do I say fuck it to anything that oppresses me even revolutionary sisters and brothers?:: A white sister, Leslie, spoke up. She dug what I said but also felt that Hughey was a good choice for speaker because of his revolutionary practice and inspirational qualities. But there should be a heavy woman speaker too with a strong Woman's consciousness. The Panther, Doug, nodded and left the room. When he came back I knew we were off the tracks and this group of people were actually formulating an agenda. A man and woman would speak and there would be a chairwoman for the meetings. The workshops would include women's rights, sexual self-determination, child oppression, the family, as well as self-determination for racial minorities. One of the Black men started to put us down as frivolous, with a barb for the sexuality of the gay women. Doug said, "OH no, brother, that just doesn't go anymore." The meeting took off. We were together.

When the larger group reconvened I somewhat expected the Panthers to protest the tentative agenda but no one questioned it. We broke up planning another meeeting in a few days. At this point the THIRD WORLD GAY REVOLUTION handed out to the Panthers and the assembly their strong and beautiful statement THE OPPRESSED SHALL NOT BECOME THE OPPRESSOR

One of the male Panthers

'ame up to me. He had been particularly hostile to the 'exism issue during the meeting. I found out later his 'ame is David Hillard. "I want you to know that what I 'id had nothing to do with the fact you are a lesbian. I 'ay 'right on' to lesbian liberation." I told him it certainly didn't seem that way to me. We came because invited, to test the receptivity of the convention toward Gay and Women's Liberation and not only was my attempt smashed down but I was called crazy and sabatour. I told him I had been made aware that I came on in an oppressive way but he and others made no attempt to understand me. He repeated that he had nothing against lesbians getting their rights but he couldn't support male homosexuals because in prison they were "snitches" and besides he had problems with his own masculinity. He said that the Panthers were coming out with a statement on Gay Liberation next week and as a Panther he would "back up his word with his life". As I watched him walk away I felt that I had just talked to a human being — another connection had been made. The bombastic Panther-in-public gave way to a black man caught in the contradictions of these times. Rising out of his incredible oppression the assertion of his humanity takes the form of "Being-A-Man" and that is what he has become. Now he is being told that this too is oppression and has to go. Perhaps through the discipline of the Party and because of his own oppression he is open to this new struggle. I think perhaps I can be part of that struggle. Certainly in some way I felt that the people present had been affected by us, or would be. I know that I was touched and affected by them.

What came through to me was an immense commitment to revolutionary struggle born of an oppression beyond my experience. The task is to somehow make the pain and enslavement of Women and Gays felt as a force and presence.

On the way back to New York I realized my real connection to the struggle to transform the Black Liberation movement was in the people of the THIRD WORLD GAY REVOLUTION. I remembered that part of the reason I went to the agenda meeting was Frenchie's smiling at me saying, "What did you expect? We've only just begun." My involvement had alot to do with Kip's and Ann's confrontations and their continued acceptance of me as a gay sister and friend.

As I look forward to the convention and the formulation of our new constitution I have no doubts that the present hierarchial, dogmatic structure of the Panthers is an oppressive force and I wonder what this spoken solidarity will really mean. But the constitution is something else. If the document is actually permitted to be the product of the oppressed peoples convening to write it then it will transcend all of our individual limitations. For this I can work — that our emerging consciousness, our first attempts at alternate forms, will not bear the features of THE MAN.

Reprinted from Come Out

"I AM ENGAGED~

Leila Khaled, now being held in England, and six other Palestinian commandos held in West Germany and Switzerland will be freed. The governments holding the guerillas made this announcement Sept. 29, after six Americans, the last of the hundreds of hostages seized in the commando hijackings, were freed in Amman.

Leila has been held in England since her unsuccessful attempt to hijack an El Al 707 jet on Sept. 6. Her male companion was killed during the attempt.

Leila was in charge of another successful hijacking in August, 1969, when she ripped off a TWA Boeing jet flying from Rome. She and her assistant blew up the plane in Damascus, Syria. Leila later gave the following full account of the hijacking to author and journalist G.H. Jansen, former editor of Middle East Forum.

Isn't it something awful that I could see my home town again only when I hijacked a plane? But there it was - Haifa - away on the left just past the pilot's head as I sat behind him looking out of the cockpit windows. As we came down to 12,000 feet for the approach to Lydda airport the whole lovely coast of my country, occupied Palestine, which some people call "Israel," came into sight.

It was a fine, clear day, but I had little time to enjoy the view because we were approaching the most exciting and dangerous point of our adventure. Although the pilot had so far done everything I told him, would he, somehow, land the plane at Lydda? Or would the Israelis be able to force us to land?

It had all begun two days earlier in Rome. This was my first visit to Europe and Rome is a wonderful city. I was very tired when I arrived and slept for ten hours solid.

Then the evening before the flight I walked through the city from the Borghese Gardens to the Fountain of Trevi. Of course, I threw the traditional coins in the fountain which means, I hope, that I'll see Rome again: but will the Italians let me in next time?

There was a woman singer in a cafe near the fountain and I just sat and listened for two hours. The only other things I did were to buy myself a bottle of French perfume and to confirm my booking for the flight next day to Athens at the TWA office.

I couldn't eat dinner that night and it was three in the morning before I could get to sleep and when I awoke I had no appetite for breakfast either. I was hungry, but I'm accustomed to hunger because of my commando training and also because, when I was young, there were times when there wasn't very much food at home.

In the morning - this was the 29th August - I had to do some shopping at a very chic shop on the Via Veneto. I bought some very big sunglasses, a leather shoulder bag and a large-brimmed hat which alone cost 15,000 lira. Wickedly expensive I know, but this was all part of the uniform - I had to look like someone who usually travelled first-class.

Back at the hotel I got dressed. I'm not very interested in clothes but it seemed a waste of money to have things burnt when we blew up the plane after landing so I put as little as possible into my suitcase. I put two dresses in my handbag and wore two trouser suits, one on top of the other. The lower one, with psychedelic flowers, was borrowed and I wanted to return it; the top one was in very smart white cotton, sleeveless, and I wore sandals.

Because Flight 840 was late we had to wait an extra half hour in the lounge. I spotted the young man who

was the other member of the "Che Guevara" comm unit. I didn't know him and had only seen his Apart from a secret sign of recognition we too notice of each other.

This extra wait was an anxious time and two things upset me before we got on the plane. I an American lady with four young children who very happy and excited about their trip. I the ised, with a shock, that something dreadful co happen to them if anything went wrong. I love and I wanted to tell the lady not to travel on flight. But when I thought of some of our Pale children, who had nothing in life, I felt a bi

The second incident was in the bus going ou plane. A man sat next to me and asked me where from, and I let him believe I was from Bolivia he told me that he was a Greek returning to At after spending 15 years in Chicago and that hi mother would be waiting at the airport.

This was another shock. I felt it particula cause we Palestinians know what it is to be aw one's country and I too had a widowed mother w for me at home. He went on talking but I didn' the rest of what he said.

My friend and I were in the first-class bec section is nearer the cockpit. But there were first-class passengers in all, so that the cab fussed over us a great deal, which was exactly did not want. Not long after take-off, the two seated ourselves in the front row nearest the door. We both refused drinks before lunch - I drink anyway - and then we both refused lunch, we didn't want to have trays on our laps hemmi But when the stewardess exclaimed at this, and not to be conspicuous, I ordered coffee and my a beer. He also asked for a pill to suggest th feeling ill.

We didn't get rid of the cabin crew that ea Instead of lunch they brought us a huge trolle with fruits and cakes and, to our dismay, park front of us to help ourselves, completely bloc way to the cabin door.

We had been ordered to take over the plan utes to an hour after take-off since the Rom flight takes only 90 minutes, and we were ap the deadline. We didn't want to ask the host remove the trolley because that could have a suspicious. Finally, after what seemed an ag took it away and another passenger, who had the lounge seat right next to the cabin door moved away.

The way was clear and we could get into t without having to frighten anyone - that's t thing we wanted to avoid: frightened people foolish things.

I asked for a blanket and the hostess tuc around me. My friend gave me a strange look, whether I was becoming afraid. To reassure h out my toilet case and combed my hair. Then at my watch and showed him five fingers sign that in five minutes we would go into action in charge of the operation. Underneath the b and this was why I wanted it - I took a pist my shoulder bag and tucked it into the top o and then a grenade and took out the safety p

Just as everything was ready, one of the carrying a tray came out of the cabin door;

D - TO THE REVOLUTION" — LEILAH KHALED

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outwards and she held it open with her elbow. We took this chance. My friend, holding his pistol and grenade, brushed across the front of the hostess and through the door. When the hostess saw the weapons she screamed, "Oh no," and threw her tray down - that was the only violence we had in the plane during the whole journey.

As we went towards the cockpit my friend called out, "Don't move. Now you have to listen to the orders of the new captain." While he was speaking he heard the captain saying into his radio: "Two armed men have come into the cabin. This is a hijacking."

My part in the actual takeover was to stand facing down the plane to control the passengers with my pistol and grenade. But when I stood up with the grenade in my hand and reached for my pistol, I felt the pistol slipping down my leg inside my trousers. I hadn't eaten for a day, and the waistband was loose.

It was such an anti-climax that I laughed. Instead of brandishing a pistol there was I bending over with my back to the passengers and fumbling for my weapon up the leg of my trousers, of two trousers actually. The captain swivelled round in his seat to see the new captain but all he could see of "him" was the top of a large, white, lady's hat.

Having retrieved the wretched pistol I put it into my pocket, never to take it out again - too scaring and too much like Hollywood.

You can't imagine the look of total astonishment on the face of the captain when I went into the cockpit and announced, "I'm the new captain." Poor man, what did he see? - me, in my sleeveless suit, floppy hat and sandals. "I'm the new captain," I said, "take this as a souvenir - it is the safety pin from this grenade" and held it under his nose. "It's a free hand grenade now. If you don't listen to my orders, I'll use it and the plane and everyone in it will be blown up."

"What do you want?" the pilot asked. "Proceed directly to Lydda airport." "To Lydda?" the co-pilot queried, "aren't we going to Athens?" "You understand English," I said to him.

We sat down in the two seats just behind the pilot. The grenade was in my left hand and it stayed there every minute until we landed. My friend put his away but he kept his pistol out.

I asked the captain to give me his wireless headset and he was so flustered that he tried to put it on over my hat. "Excuse my hat," I said and pushed it back. I had had a ribbon specially sewn on so that I could hang it round my neck: I very much wanted to save that hat, too.

I tried to raise Rome airport but there was no answer. I then turned to the flight engineer and asked, "How many fuel hours of flight do you have?" I knew the answer because I had read this off the fuel gauge. I was sure he would tell me a lie and he did: "Two hours," he said. "Liar. I know you have three and a half hours. It's there on the fuel gauge. Why did you lie to me? The next time I ask you anything and you lie to me, I'll break your neck."

"Why are you so angry?" the captain asked. "Because I don't like liars," I replied. I wasn't really angry. I wanted to scare them a little so that they would take orders. The flight engineer said not a word for the rest of the flight.

THE TIME WAS NOW ABOUT 15.20 HOURS.

The dials and switches and lights in a plane's cockpit may seem bewildering but we had been thoroughly trained and I knew what the dials meant. I had a thorough knowledge of the Boeing 707.

Having put the crew in its place the next thing was to speak to the passengers on the intercom. Our message was this:

Ladies and Gentlemen,
Your attention please. Kindly fasten your seatbelts.
This is your new Captain speaking.
The Che Guevara Commando Unit of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine which has taken over command of this TWA flight demands that all passengers on board should adhere to the following instructions:
1-Remain seated and keep calm.
2-For your own safety, place your hands behind your head.
3-Make no move which would endanger the lives of other passengers on the plane.
4-We will consider all your demands within the safe limits of our plan.

Ladies and Gentlemen, among you is a passenger responsible for the death and misery of a number of Palestinian men, women and children, on behalf of whom we are carrying out this operation to bring this assassin before a revolutionary Palestinian court.

The rest of you will be honorable guests of the heroic Palestinian Arab people in a hospitable, friendly country. Everyone of you regardless of religion or nationality is guaranteed the freedom to go wherever he pleases as soon as the plane is safely landed.

Ladies and Gentlemen, our destination is a friendly country, and friendly people will receive you.

Thank you for your cooperation. We wish you a happy journey.

The person we were after was General Rabin (the former Israeli Chief of Staff) whom we knew had been booked on that flight. But he seemed to have changed plans at the last minute. I suppose prominent Israelis find it safer to travel on airlines other than El Al nowadays. Then I broadcast our message to the world:

The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine informs you that its Che Guevara Commando Unit is now in complete control of the Boeing plane belonging to Trans World Airlines, Flight No. 840, on its way from Rome to Lydda airport in the occupied Palestinian Arab territory.

Captain Shadia Abu-Ghazali, who has taken over command of this plane, and her colleagues request all those concerned to use the following call sign in their communication with the aircraft: POPULAR FRONT - FREE ARAB PALESTINE. And let it be clear that unless the above-mentioned sign is used in communicating with the plane, we will not care to respond.

Thank you.

Shadia Abu-Ghazali was my code name. The original Shadia was a girl resistance fighter in PFLP. She was killed in October, 1968, at the age of 21.

After this I handed over our new route map to the captain. We did not follow the usual air traffic lane over Athens and Nicosia. Instead we went straight down the Greek coast, then southeast over Heraklion in Crete and eastward to Lydda. Not a very interesting flight because it was almost all over the sea at 33,000 feet.

When the captain went on to the new course I noticed that he kept on turning to port so as to go south-westward. He may have been trying to take it up to the American Wheelus airbase near Tripoli in Libya. But I was watching the compass and ordered him back on course. After that I told him exactly when to turn and on to what bearing number on the compass.

After 15 minutes my friend reminded me that the passengers still had their hands above their heads. I looked into the cabin and so they did. I apologized for inconveniencing them and asked the hostess to serve them with whatever they wanted to eat and drink, champagne if they wanted it. Otherwise, throughout the flight we had no contact with the passengers or cabin crew.

We tried hard to get on friendly terms with the three crew members but had no luck. We asked them if they wanted anything to eat or drink but they refused. We offered them our cigarettes but they refused those too. They didn't ask a single question about us. From time to time the captain would turn round, look at me and shake his head unbelievingly. The only human contact was when the co-pilot, like a child in school, asked if he could go to the toilet.

The pilot kept glancing at the grenade in my left hand, so finally to reassure him, I put my arm across his back and tapped him on the left shoulder with the grenade: "Listen I'm accustomed to this thing. Don't be afraid." A little later I scratched my head with the grenade to show him just how familiar with it I was, but I doubt whether he was reassured.

15.55 HOURS. COMPASS BEARING 140 DEGREES.

There were long, uneventful periods during this eventful flight that were punctuated only by the messages I broadcast to the countries we flew past or over - Italy, Greece, the UAR, Lebanon and Syria. These messages explained what we had done and appealed for support "for the just struggle of the Palestinian people," and ended with the words, "Down with U.S. imperialism and Zionism. We will win," The co-pilot looked at me angrily every time I mentioned America.

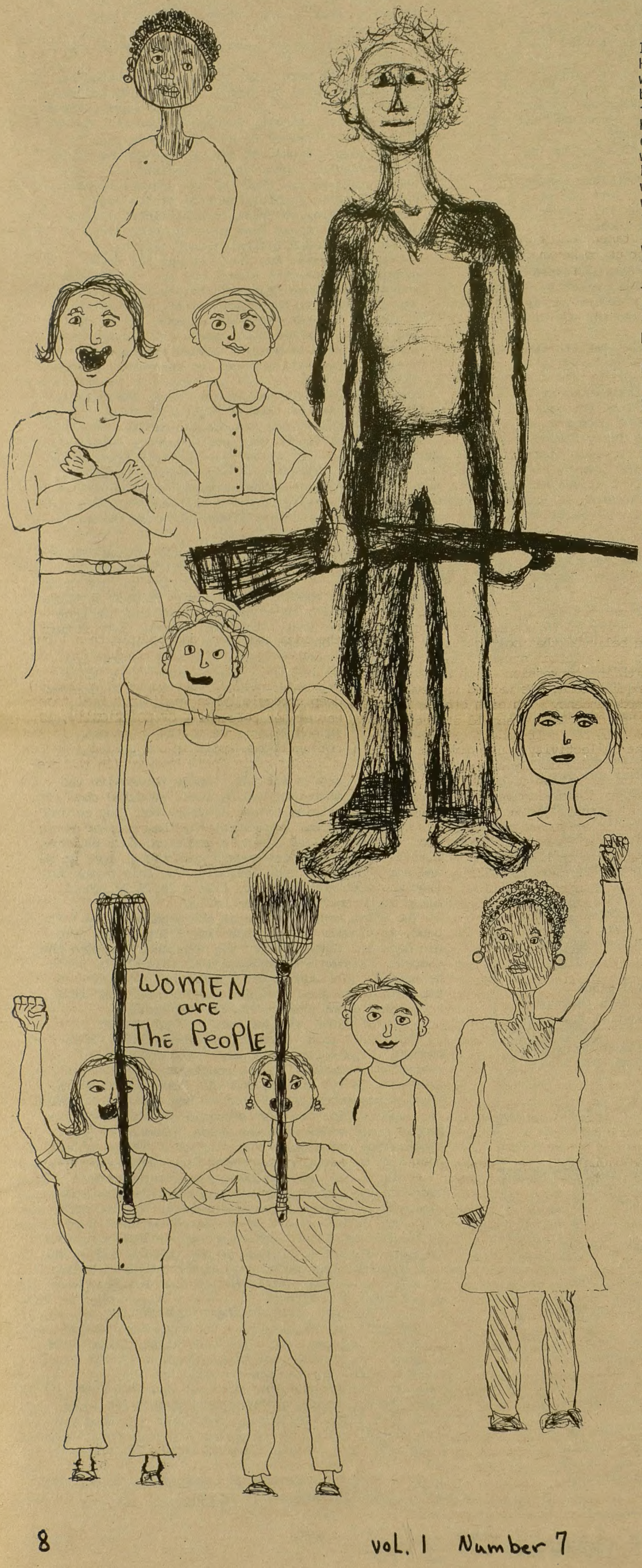
I also spoke, spontaneously, to the passengers over the intercom to explain our struggle. "We have hijacked his plane because we want to cut the roots that feed Israel. Don't go to Israel because there is resistance on land and en route: tell this to your friends. We want to go back to our country and we can live with the Jews because we lived with them before." We tried to explain things to the crew but they were an unreceptive audience.

16.10 HOURS. COMPASS BEARING 112 DEGREES.

The exchange of messages I had with Cairo airport in Arabic, were amusing. They were flabbergasted when a woman's voice told them what had happened and where we were going. I first had to tell them that I wouldn't respond till they used our own call sign. Then, the breathless response came from Cairo something like this: "You Popular you Front you Free you Arab you Palestine! Why-are-you-going-to-Israel?" And I replied, "Yes, we are going to Israel, to liberate it!"

LOOK FOR FURTHER ADVENTURE OF LEILA KHALED IN OUR NEXT ISSUE. LONG LIVE LEILA! (LNS)

we've begun doing something revolutionary;
we've begun to think of women as the people.



i like to think of harriet tubman

I like to think of Harriet Tubman.
Harriet Tubman who carried a revolver,
who had a scar on her head from a rock thrown
by a slave-master (because she
talked back), and who
had a ransom on her head
of thousands of dollars and who
was never caught, and who
had no use for the law
when the law was wrong,
who defied the law. I like
to think of her.
I like to think of her especially
when I think of the problem of
feeding children.

The legal answer
to the problem of feeding children
is ten free lunches every month,
being equal, in the child's real life,
to eating lunch every other day.
Monday but not Tuesday.
I like to think of the President
eating lunch Monday, but not
Tuesday.
and when I think of the President
and the law, and the problem of
feeding children, I like to
think of Harriet Tubman
and her revolver.

And then sometimes
I think of the President
and other men,
men who practise the law,
who revere the law,
who enforce the law
who live behind
and operate through
and feed themselves
at the expense of
starving children
because of the law,
men who sit in paneled offices
and think about vacations
and tell women
whose care it is
to feed children
not to be hysterical
not to be hysterical as in the word
hysterikos, the greek for
womb suffering,
not to suffer in their
wombs,
not to care,
not to bother the men
because they want to think
of other things
and do not want
to take the women seriously.
I want them to take women seriously.
I want them to think about Harriet Tubman
and remember,
remember she was beat by a white man
and she lived
and she lived to redress her grievance,
and she lived in swamps
and wore the clothes of a man
bringing hundreds of fugitives from
slavery, and was never caught,
and led an army,
and won a battle,
and defied the laws
because the laws were wrong, I want men
to take us seriously.
I am tired wanting them to think
about right and wrong.
I want them to fear.

I want them to feel fear now
as I have felt suffering in the womb, and
I want them
to know
that there is always a time
there is always a time to make right
what is wrong,
there is always a time
for retribution
and that time
is beginning.

--Susie Griffin

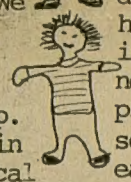
reprinted from
issue #14 of
It Ain't Me Babe

by the sisters in the Collective that has no name

Kathie Cota	Judy Heimel
Ann McGee	Mary Kuhry
Joan Primeau	Nancy Lohmann
Mary Lotterman	Ann Clark
Helen Sullinger	Casey Higgins
Susan Miler	Karen Clark

Sisters, having tripped over our own humility too many times since we were born, we write this to you because we want to share the discoveries we have made in our past year together. These reflections are written in four parts: first, a brief history of our collective, how it was formed, and how it developed; second, how we have struggled together--and the insights our struggles have given us; third, the ongoing struggles and reoccuring problems we are attempting to deal with; and finally, why we believe that collective groups are essential to our development as individuals, as sisters, and as Female revolutionaries. (The emphasis here is on the word Female, not revolutionaries. We need collectives to build the Female Revolution.)

REFLECTIONS ON COLLECTIVES



I. OUR HISTORY

Our collective (sometimes called the Women's Collective because we can't think of a name) began meeting in early October of 1969. The first meetings were brought together by two sisters, who felt primary responsibility for keeping the group together for much of its early existence. Twenty women were invited to the first meeting. We came from diverse political backgrounds. Some of us had been heavily involved with the "New Left"; others had no connection with it. Some were active in Women's Liberation; others were only beginning to examine our lives as women in American society. None of us knew everyone who came to the first meeting. Some of us knew only one or two people.

The first question we dealt with when we began meeting was what we wanted the group to be. We decided we needed two things: a politically active group (which we called socialist) and a group which would respond to the needs of individuals, to help us develop the talents and skills we felt we needed.

For five months the collective met regularly with a core of eight to twelve women. An additional fifteen to twenty women came either sporadically or only once or twice. After we had been meeting for a short time we decided to start a medical referral service for women (now called the Women's Counseling Service). Our intent from the beginning was that once the WCS opened it would operate independent of our collective. We chose the Counseling Service as our political project for a number of reasons. We felt the need to respond to the immediate problems which women everywhere are facing. We felt that the Counseling Service would give us the opportunity to get together with women who had not been involved in Women's Liberation. It would also be a means of attacking the male supremacist medical establishment. We felt that this would be a good way to begin to develop the skills and talents we needed. Finally, we felt the need to actively work on something together in order to build a collective identity and to experience each other in ways that went beyond our weekly meetings. We divided into committees to do the preliminary work necessary to start the Women's Counseling Service. At our regular meetings we would spend one week discussing our work on the Counseling Service and the next week discussing topics ranging from our oppression as women to a Marxist view of history.

In April of 1970, when the Women's Counseling Service was about to open, the collective split into two groups. Political and personal conflict had been building for several months and had reached the point where it could no longer be contained. The night we split was ugly. It was impossible to work out the anger and hostility and frustration that was there. Even yet we feel the reverberations of hurt and tension from that night and the months before. When we look back and see how we have grown, we feel that the split was essential. (We discontinued meeting for two months to firmly establish the Women's Counseling Service and then began meeting again in June. The other group maintains the name Women's Collective, has added new members and continues to meet.) It was much better for the two groups to work out their different political approaches than to try to mesh them together. We hope that soon we can come together as sisters again and share what we have learned in the past months. (The character of the split will be further explained in the section on how we have struggled.) Of the original twenty sisters called together in October, seven are still in our collective. There are twelve of us now. We have chosen to keep the number small so that we are able to develop deep friendships, to get inside of each other, and to actively help each other grow.

II. HOW WE HAVE STRUGGLED

It has taken months of struggle together for us to begin feeling like a cohesive force. There were several times in the past year when we were not sure that our group would stay together or that the problems we had were worth trying to work with each other. We say this to encourage sisters who are attempting to begin new collectives to keep struggling.

When we began meeting we intentionally decided to call ourselves a collective rather than a consciousness-raising group, committee, society or other type of gathering. The word collective meant several very important things to us. It meant that we were going to attempt to act together as a unit, rather than in the individualistic way we are taught to act by our society. We wanted to overcome the individualism that isolates us from other women and causes us to compete with each other. We believed that collectivity would give us political strength as women to deal with the oppression which none of us can conquer alone. We wanted to develop an interdependency with each other. We rejected the idea that we should strive, as men have, to be "self-made." We believed that collectivity would give us strength both individually and as a group.

With this definition of collectivity in mind, we began discussing various political and personal issues. As we talked conflicts began to arise and we, in turn, tried to find out where they came from. When we reflected on the situation and began discussing the ways in which we were relating to each other we noticed several things. We saw that we were competing with each other for knowledge. When one of us would put forth an analysis or idea, others would respond by saying, "I knew that already", or "That's obvious" (only in much subtler terms). Each of us wanted to say that we knew it all before. We were threatened by the thought that other sisters could teach us something because that meant they were somehow above us. (Incidentally, we're pretty sure this is a very "male" pattern of relating to each other.)

Recognizing this fact (and it was very important for us to be able to admit it to each other), we tried to find a new way to relate to each other. We saw that we had been responding to each other and to ourselves "individually". We thought about the fact that when we came together "we" (the collective we) knew nothing. There were no common experiences, thoughts or ideas which we all shared together. Although it was possible that all of us had had some of the same thoughts, until they were spoken aloud to the group they remained unconscious and could not possibly give "us" a common identity. It became very clear to us that to have a collective we had to build a set of experiences, thoughts and ideas which we could hold in common. We had to build something outside all of us that was the product of all of us put together. A new concept of relating to each other began to emerge from our reflections.

Figuratively, it looked like this: We thought about all of us sitting around a big brown crockery pot (our collective identity--experiences, thoughts, ideas) and each of us throwing in all of the thoughts, experiences and ideas we wanted to share with the group. As we threw them in, we'd stir them up and many of the ideas took on new shape and meaning. All the things in the pot brought us closer together. We got to know each other not on a one-to-one or a one-to-two basis, but on a twelve-to-twelve basis.

Our collective experiences, ideas, thoughts, (ie., our collective history) were created not only by throwing things in the crock, but also by the work we did together and the struggles we went through. As we look into the pot today, the bottom is barely full. We have a hunch the pot can never be filled--although it has overflowed several times.

Since we have begun throwing things into our crock, we have not noticed ourselves competing with each other (well, sometimes we slip backwards, but our sisters always pull us back). We have begun to think of our ideas as gifts to the group--to all of us. They can't possibly make any of us lesser but can only make all of us stronger.

Another discovery we have made through our struggles is the need for us to think out loud together. (Not only is it necessary, but it's fun!) The only time we (individually) used to have the guts to say an idea was when we had thought about it for several weeks or months and were sure it had no holes in it and that we could defend it against anyone's attack. Because after all, our ideas are OUR ideas! What we have come to see is that ideas can never belong to individuals and that in fact they are never created there either. They are the product of people's experiences together, so it's pretty silly to covet an idea or to think that it's not valuable unless we can defend it. It's the experience of an idea, not its defense, that is important. What we have strived to do in our collective is to think about ideas out loud; that is, to bring a glimpse of a new idea to the group and to work out the idea with each other. That way we experience the idea together, add to it with all our experiences. In the end the idea and the collective both gain from the experience.

These insights came to us at a time of deep struggle, when we did not feel together either personally or politically, ie., in our first five months together. It was not until the split in our collective took place in early April that we (in the present collective) began to feel united with each other. In fact it was the split itself, the issues of it as well as the emotional traumas, that finally brought us together. From the beginning there were conflicts (both political and personal) between members of the original collective. The division, as it was finally manifested, was between those women who were also active members in SDS and those of us who were not. The split occured at a time in which our minds were jumping with new ideas, the time in which we were at last able to say to each other and to ourselves that we did not "need" men. This was a liberating thing for us. At the same time we realized for the first time how much we needed women. This realization, in the face of unresolvable differences in the collective was almost unbearable. (The differences are too extensive to go into here and are not important to the purposes of this paper.) We were discovering sisterhood, but at the same time had reached a point in which the only way that we could continue to grow was to divide for a time. The political side of our break with the other women forced us to clarify our politics to each other. The emotional side led us to unite our stomachs as well as our heads. From that initial union we have continued to grow together both personally and politically.

The next two parts of this essay will be printed in the next issue of Ain't I A Woman?

for more information contact:
THE WOMEN'S COUNSELING SERVICE
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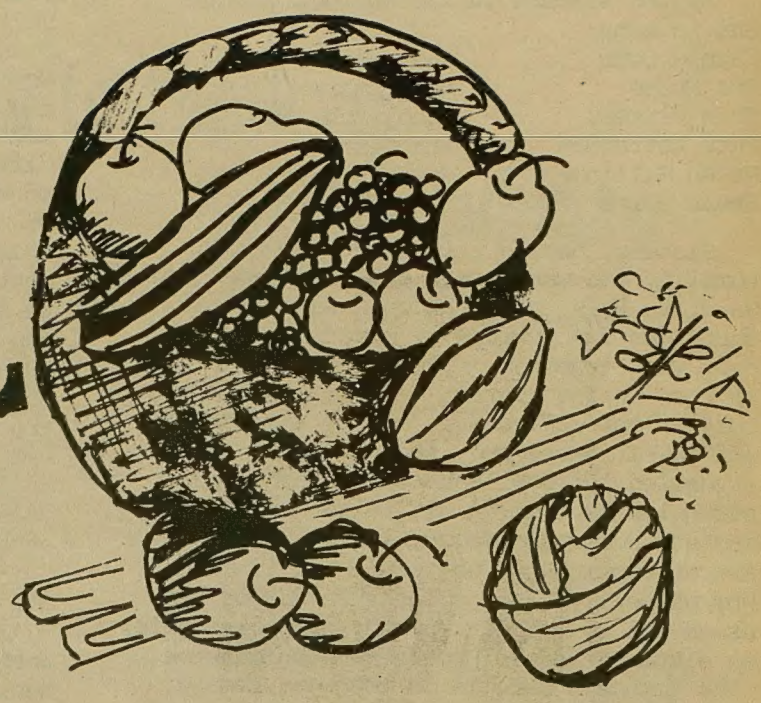
ESSENTIAL FOOD



In New York City a Women's commune organized a food co-op (organic). They bought it wholesale and sold it for no profits, making it cheaper than supermarket prices. It was collective in action and could be considered as an alternative, keeping in mind the possibility of being satisfied too easily, before the goals are accomplished.

When shopping in a supermarket you should be aware that the essential quality of food is to sustain. Don't buy foods that have additives in them, that do nothing for you (this would be supporting the whole Amerikan policy of overabundance and waste).

Avoid white sugar and white bread. They are concentrated carbohydrates that contain no vitamins or minerals of any kind. Your body spends more energy trying to utilize white sugar than the energy it produces. Use honey or raw sugar, and any whole wheat or or unbleached flour.

Understand proteins. Protein foods are of two kinds- first class found in lean meats, eggs, milk, cheese, yeast, whole wheat products, especially wheat germ, soya beans and nuts. The second class proteins are found in dry beans, peas, corn, and gelatin. Because the Amerikan ideal that "a chicken in every pot" is equatable with social status, not much emphasis has been put on using soybeans as a meat replacement. Soybeans have a high percentage of protein and practically the same food value as animal protein. It contains in nearly maximum proportions the amino acids, calcium and B vitamins essential in the diet. Economically it is one of the cheapest ways of adding more protein to the diet.

Avoid canned meats. These are usually those which are unfit for the fresh meat market and have to be canned to prevent loss. They are usu ally treated with saltpeter and nitrous acid solutions to add color and hide decomposition.

You can avoid some pesticides by buying lean meats and chickens. Since DDT concentrates in fat, buy sirloin and round, less marbled meats with lower fat content.

Eat food that represents a fair share of the world's food for each person. Think collectively. Think in terms of what you need to sustain. When so many have nothing to eat, anything besides what you essentially need is waste, and this includes all food additives. Know that the "superfood" you buy is helping the Amerikan capitalists exploit other lands for high yielding crops.

Get rid of all the shit- REVOLUTION NOW

Trying to write the second article on essential foods was much more difficult than I anticipated. It was easy in the first article to place the blame on man and the capitalistic system which fosters pollution through an exploitive economic system. A solution also was clear- through our collectivity, through our sisterhood we would refuse to eat the pig shit. However, now when I try to write the alternatives I am faced with the question of relevance... if we spend much of our energies on the ecology problem, are we not helping this system to continue (slightly improved for those who can afford it) rather than tearing it down? For example, Standard Oil has done a lot of advertising lately as to how they are taking the lead out of the gasoline and now we should buy their gasoline. What they don't mention is that by taking the lead out of gas (which should never have been put in originally) they are depleting "our oil reserves". And "our oil reserves" just happen to be in South America and the Middle East. It is not even our land they are drilling and ruining. So by supporting Standard Oil's "Ecology for you" project we are participating in the rape of a third world country. Wouldn't it be better just to take over Standard Oil?

REVOLUTION

And while we are looking at Standard Oil's destruction being made palatable for the Amerikan public, look at how Amerikan technology exploits farmers around the world. The technologists tried to upgrade food production in underdeveloped countries by introducing high yielding varieties of wheat, corn, rice, chemical fertilizers and pesticides. What they didn't take into account was that for thousands of years the whole culture had revolved around primitive farm practices directed not for money profit but to feed the farmer and his family. Each family had a small plot and used human wastes as fertilizer and animal wastes as fuel. Small crop yields left little to be stored. Hungry people ate the food before the rodents did. In China and South East Asia farming has continued in some areas for 40 centuries because the fertile soil is terraced, and irrigated waste materials are recycled. Because of Amerikan interest in profits, the growing of money crops in these countries became very advanced.

Before World War II agricultural researchers directed their attention to rubber and sugar plantations. They advanced methods, and varieties to coffee farms, and modernized the production of bananas. Those crops were then used in foreign exchange and made the Amerikans wealthy. Because the controlling interests were outside the country and were for profits, the crops had to be grown right. Corn and wheat were cross-bred to produce higher yields and short stalks (easily harvested). They were used in India and South East Asia. Yields were doubled and tripled. Problems began to spring up because the new varieties of produce had a different taste and texture to what the people had preferred for centuries. As a result the marketplace value fell, and the small farmer sustained the loss. Some areas had no huge storehouses to match the yields and bushels of grain spoiled. The produce needed fertilizer and few of these countries are endowed with raw materials needed for manufacture of chemical fertilizers. The farmers needed tractors and other equipment and were forced to sell out to the large landholders who were becoming richer and richer. Besides all this the chemical fertilizers were reacting against the soil that had been recycled for generations. The crops were resistant to a large degree to insects and disease attacks (they had to be to survive.) The new improved plants were really attractive to insects and rodents and now pesticides have to be sprayed.

The experts couldn't have cared less what would happen to the land when they supplanted the "inefficient" ways that had evolved for centuries. Here again is the capitalist exploiting nature and exploiting the people for his own profits.

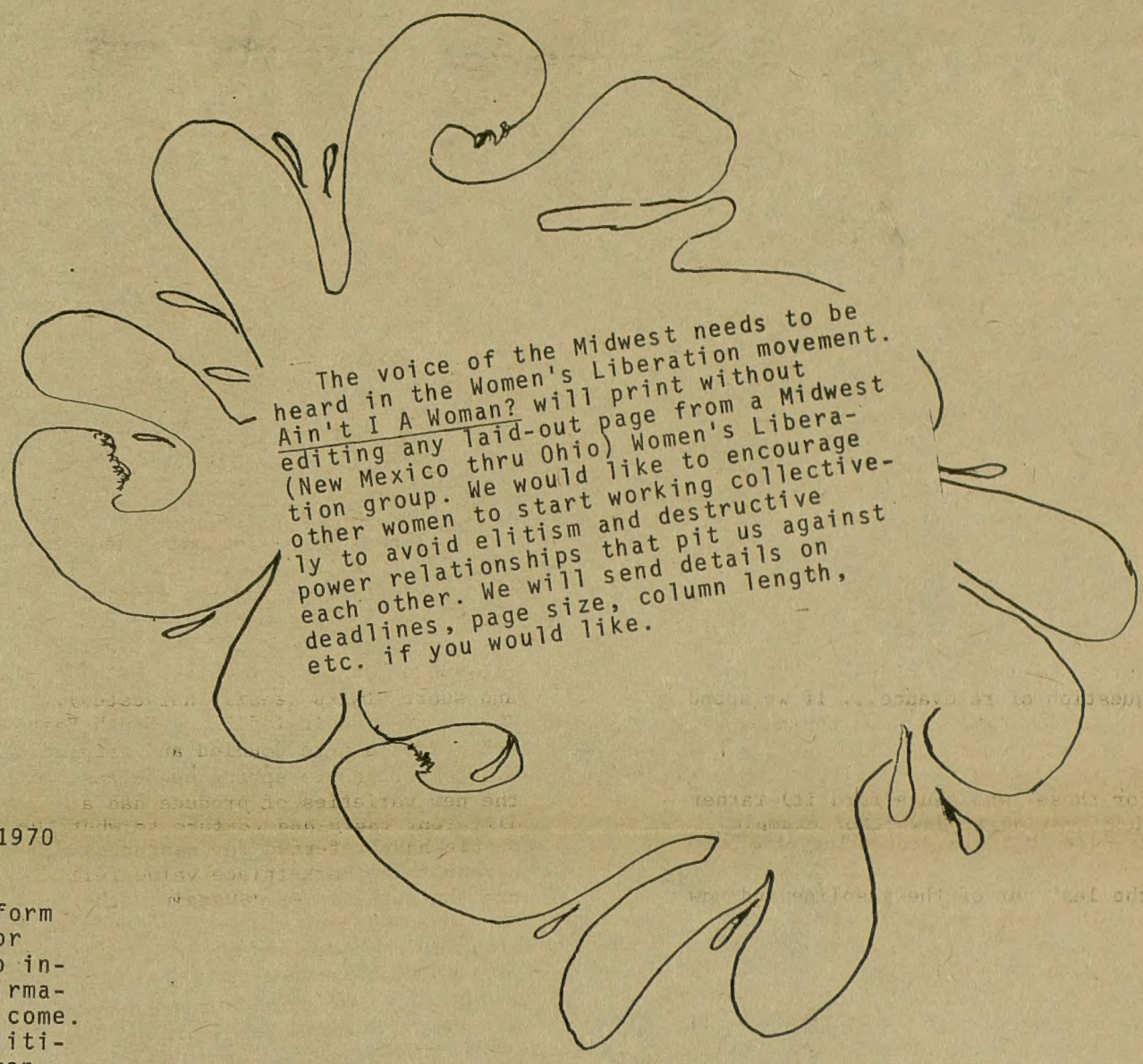
REVOLUTION

Organic Farming constitutes conflicting ideas. It's true if you grow your own food you will not be supporting the capitalist system. However it also makes you a part of the culture because farming is co-optable. The land is not available for all people who want to farm and therefore a small group will again control the food resources and will be able to sell at a profit. And while they are harvesting and milking their cows, with their conciousness being satisfied, they can't be taking part in the Revolution and so the farming becomes an end rather than the means to an end.

revolution now

Ain't I a Woman?
is published by the Publications Collective of the Iowa City Women's Liberation Front. We are a group of 10 women.

I hope that someone can tell me
tell me why love is, why love is
just like a ball and chain
— Janis Joplin



The voice of the Midwest needs to be heard in the Women's Liberation movement. Ain't I A Woman? will print without editing any laid-out page from a Midwest (New Mexico thru Ohio) Women's Liberation group. We would like to encourage other women to start working collectively to avoid elitism and destructive power relationships that pit us against each other. We will send details on deadlines, page size, column length, etc. if you would like.

AIN'T I A WOMAN? is published on the second and fourth Fridays of each month by the Publications Collective of the Iowa City Women's Liberation Front, P.O. Box 1169, Iowa City, Iowa 52240

September 21, 1970

Sisters,

This is an invitation. We want to inform you that we are planning a conference for November 13,14,15. We have just begun to invite speakers, but already we have confirmatiom that Marlene Dixon will be able to come. We hope to have a very wide range of political views and topics. Hopefully many women will be coming from all over the United States, but especially the Midwest, to participate.

This weekend should be a very exciting one for all those who can come. We will be sending you more details as they develop. But for now would you send us any ideas you have and your thoughts on this conference.

Grinnell Women's Liberation Front

3837 boul. St-Laurent
Montreal, P.Q.
September 12, 1970

Sisters,

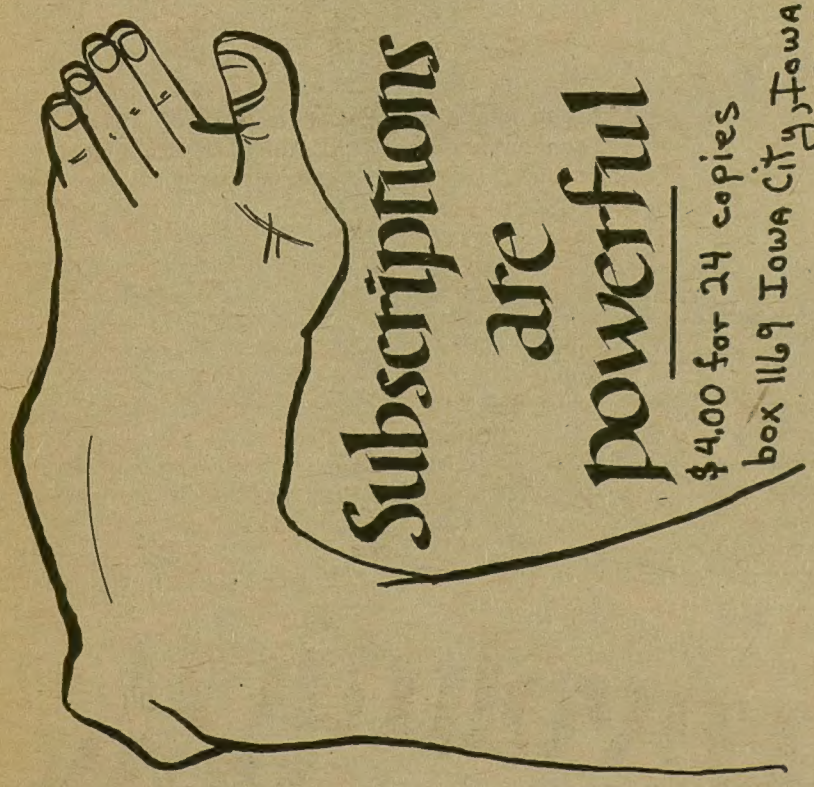
The response we got to the idea of a conference here in October was really great and proved how necessary it is.
However, we have run into large problems of organization and time. First of all, the Vietnamese women will not be coming in October, but there is a possibility that they may visit sometime next March. And in terms of ourselves in Montreal, we have been undergoing basic upheavals and haven't been sufficiently together to organize our part in the way we had planned.

Some women suggested that Toronto would be a more accessible location, and we are presently waiting to hear from our Toronto sisters about the possibilities of holding the conference there.

We want to stress that no definite decisions have been made either for or against, and that we are just trying our best to come up with something concrete as soon as possible.

We will be in touch with you again soon. Please forgive the inconveniece and delay and also please excuse the form letter thing; it's only a regrettable measure for speed.

Montreal Women's Liberation



If your group wants to receive bundles of AIN'T I A WOMAN?, send 15¢ per copy. Minimum bundle: 20 copies

1

I have just begun
to share with my sister
in the blossoming
secret
of us

2

Constant candle
candle to wondering
only a stick in the darkness
One more breath
no more flame
Now it is perfectly clear

3

A million lovers
in a line joined
like an oval
And any one
is part of
any two.

notes to a man

you're so helpless, you're so cold
i always wondered about you
little questions, smaller signs
look into my paper eyes
see if you can break me.

our little excuses
shaped by everything within us
drowned by everything without us
freedom now!

your humor leaves me silent
you watch me watching
can you hear me crying
can you see my slow hand fisting
freedom now!

"sensitivity" you say "understand me"
freedom now!

maybe somebody is paying off somebody?
maybe there never was and never will be
a chance for us
maybe it is lost and gone forever
dreadful sorry

clementine.